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AUTHOR Meehan, Merrill L.
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ABSTRACT

To determine whether the content of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory's (AEL) Regional Exchange, which is published as a regional insert to a quarterly magazine entitled the Educational R&D Report, is geared to its target audiences, a content analysis was conducted on five of the AEL inserts. The research questions formulated for the content analysis were: (1) What categories of and how many educators receive the AEL Regional Exchange? (2) What percent of the articles are geared to those categories of educators? (3) What proportion of the insert's total column lines is targeted to those categories of educators? and (4) What is the average number of column lines dedicated to each category? The mailing list of the Educational R&D Report was analyzed to determine the educator categories used in the content analysis. A content analysis form was then designed and the articles in each insert coded for the educator categories at which they were targeted. Data were tallied and analyzed. The results are discussed in detail and presented in four tables corresponding to the four questions addressed by the study. A set of recommendations for changes in the AEL Regional Exchange and a copy of the content analysis form are included. (JL)

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Analysis of Five AEL Regional Exchange Inserts to the Educational R & D Report

by

Merrill L. Meehan
Educational R & D Specialist

May 1980

Educational Services Office
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325

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INTRODUCTION

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc. (AEL or the Laboratory) was created as a non-profit corporation in 1966 as a mechanism for bringing the results of research and development (R & D) to bear on the improvement of practice. AEL was formed by educators from its member-states when Congress authorized the creation of regional educational laboratories serving multi-state regions. The seven state area served by AEL includes Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. Since its creation, the mission of AEL has remained constant: To improve education and educational opportunity for those who live in the Laboratory's primary nonurban member-state region.

AEL is governed and directed by a 42-member Board of Directors composed of education and lay leaders throughout the seven member-states. Included on this Board are representatives from state departments of education, higher education institutions, classroom teachers' associations, school administrators' organizations, and the public at large. The Board has instructed the Laboratory to concentrate its resources and talents on R & D in childhood and parenting and career guidance and to provide R & D services to member-states.

Providing R & D services to member-states is the responsibility of AEL's Educational Services office (ESO). The ESO operates through three main subdivisions: (1) special projects and contracted services, (2) the Regional Services program (RS), and (3) the Regional Exchange program (Rx). The latter two ESO subdivisions are funded by the National Institute of Education's (NIE) Unit on Regional Programs. The AEL-Rx program also serves the states of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

The nationwide Research and Development Exchange (RDx), one of NIE's Regional Programs, consists of a total of eleven major components. AEL's Regional Exchange is one of seven regional exchanges in the RDx. Four central support system agencies assist these seven regional exchanges. Created in 1976, the RDx is a network of regional educational laboratories and university-based R & D centers working to support state and local school improvement efforts. Guiding the work of the overall RDx and the individual regional exchanges is a set of four common goals. The four Rx goals are:

1. To promote collaboration among dissemination and school improvement programs,
2. To promote the use of R & D outcomes that support dissemination and school improvements efforts,
3. To promote collaboration among knowledge utilization functionaries in the region to foster school improvement, and
4. To develop and test strategies for communicating the educational improvement needs of the region to appropriate R & D producers.

One of AEL's five major activities for accomplishing Rx goal statement number two is the preparation of the AEL Regional Exchange which is a four-page insert to the Educational R & D Report.

The Educational R & D Report is a quarterly magazine about educational research and development activities. It is published by the Council for Educational Development and Research (CEDaR) through its Cooperative School Improvement program. During 1978-79, the magazine was published by CEMREL, Inc. as part of the RDx program. Approximately 13,000 copies of the publication are produced and distributed nationally. More than half the recipients are school district level personnel. Other recipients include state education agency staff; institution of higher education staff; and researchers, developers, and policymakers. There is no fee for receiving the publication.

The major purpose of the Educational R & D Report is to put practicing educators in touch with activities and products from the educational research community, both nationwide and regionwide. Three major sections of the Educational R & D Report provide the nationwide perspective: (1) R & D Outcomes, (2) R & D Training, and (3) R & D Happenings. The R & D Outcomes section contains short articles about new research findings, policy implications, new R & D-based products or practices, and research publications or synthesis documents of interest to educational practitioners. The R & D Training section carries reports of available training products and practices as well as announcements of training opportunities. R & D Happenings includes announcements of new R & D initiatives, notices of new services available to practitioners, announcements of national conferences sponsored by R & D institutions, and special interest stories. Physically, each issue measures 7" x 11" and is 20 to 24 pages long, excluding the regional exchange insert.

Regionwide perspectives on research and development activities and products are provided by four page inserts to the Educational R & D Report. Each of the seven RDx regional exchanges is responsible for the copy of its insert. Content of the Regional Exchange inserts varies from a long, single-topic article to a series of short paragraphs or notices. These inserts are printed on contrasting color stock (usually buff or goldenrod), collated into those Educational R & D Reports being produced for the region, and mailed to recipients. Copy for the AEL Regional Exchange is produced and edited at AEL then forwarded to CEDaR for typesetting, printing, folding, binding, and distributing to educational practitioners in the AEL region. The AEL recipients' addresses are maintained on a central computerized file in the CEDaR office.

PROBLEM

Two volumes of Educational R & D Report containing AEL Regional Exchange inserts were published during the period of 1978-1979. Each issue of the AEL Regional Exchange insert was distributed to over 2,200 educators in the AEL-Rx region. Systematic procedures to evaluate the majority of the activities and products of the AEL-Rx have been implemented. However, there has not been an evaluation of the AEL Regional Exchange inserts.

In February, 1980, the Director of the ESO asked this writer to perform a "content analysis of the AEL Regional Exchange inserts to see if, in fact, the articles are geared to its target audiences." Lacking resources to perform sophisticated research such as syntactical analyses, this writer planned and conducted a rather simple and straightforward content analysis of available AEL Regional Exchange inserts.

Specific questions were formulated to address the charge. They were:

1. What categories and how many educators each currently are receving the AEL Regional Exchange?
2. What percent of the articles are geared to those categories of educators receiving the AEL Regional Exchange?
3. What proportion of the AEL Regional Exchanges' total column lines is targeted to those educator categories receiving the publication?
4. What is the average number of column lines per category receiving the AEL Regional Exchange?

Based on the answers to these questions, recommendations for future issues of the AEL-generated insert were developed.

METHOD

Procedures

To answer the above research questions, all available AEL Regional

Exchange inserts were analyzed. Specifically, the following AEL Regional Exchange issues were located and utilized: Volume 1, Numbers 2 and 3; Volume 2, Numbers 1, 2, and 3. It was decided to use the combined content of these five available AEL inserts because: (1) they provided more articles to analyze, and (2) they represented a population study rather than a sample study.

Several preanalysis procedures were conducted in an effort to produce an objective analysis of the AEL Regional Exchange contents. First, an analysis of the Educational R & D Report mailing list was conducted in order to determine the various categories of educators receiving the publication (with the AEL insert). A computer printout of the names, titles, and addresses of educators in the eleven-state AEL region was secured from the CEDaR office. A simple recipient category recording form was designed based, in part, on an earlier AEL-Rx publication mailing list analysis. An ESO research assistant was trained to read the mailing entries and to make simple tallies on the category recording form. The form provided for a page-by-page analysis. Any mailing list entry (name, title, and address) that was not "typical" or easily understood was circled by the research assistant--to be classified by the writer later. The research assistant's categorization process was checked about every ten pages. During this checking process, the previous pages were reviewed and new or "unusual" entries were discussed and classified. As a final check of this process, the writer reviewed all computer printout pages against the completed categorization form.

The second preanalysis procedure was to prepare the AEL Regional Exchange for the objective analysis. Two issues each of the five inserts were obtained (because of back-to-back printing). Starting with the first article

in the Volume 1, Number 2 issue, each article was numbered in order through this issue, on into the next issue, and so forth to the last article in the last issue. Next, each article, with its number intact, was cut apart from the others and taped to a single sheet (or more if necessary) of plain white 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Because some of the articles' titles could influence the reader assigning it to a recipient category, the title for each article was cut out and not included on the plain paper. Using the table of random numbers contained in Blalock (1972) and procedures described therein (pp. 510-513), a noninvolved support staff secretary selected the starting point in the table from which the order of the articles for categorizing was determined. All articles from all available AEL Regional Exchange inserts were ordered randomly and assembled as a group. Each page was then numbered in order from front to rear with a different colored ink to preserve the random ordering in case of a mix-up or an accident (the set of articles was not bound or stapled).

Actual analysis of the AEL Regional Exchange inserts' contents occurred in several steps. First, a simple form was designed which contained all the recipient categories as column heads with room for article numbers as the row titles (see Appendix A). Second, three senior level professional employees in the ESO read and judged the articles. Each article was read by each person and, based on the reader's knowledge and experience, each article was judged to be primarily targeted to one of the recipient categories from the mailing list. A tally mark was registered in that category on the form. Third, a meeting of the three judges was held to discuss individual placements, to resolve conflicting placements, and to reach consensus on each article's placement on the form. Fourth, the columns were totaled and

percentages were computed and recorded. Fifth, the total number of lines of copy in the AEL Regional Exchange per category was computed. Sixth, the columns were totaled and the percentage of total lines per category was computed and recorded. Seventh, means and standard deviations for the number of column lines per category were computed and recorded. Last, data from the previous steps were displayed in table form in preparation for this report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this inhouse study of the AEL Regional Exchange inserts are presented in this section. Data are dealt with in terms of the four research questions presented in the PROBLEM section. Tables are used to present data answering all four questions. Discussions of results germane to each question are presented here rather than in a following section due to the brevity of the study and also for the reader's convenience. It is assumed that the reader can distinguish between data presentations and discussions of these data.

Research question number one asked what categories of educators are receiving the AEL Regional Exchange and how many are there in each such category. Results of the current AEL region mailing list of the Educational R & D Report, according to procedures described in the previous section, are displayed in Table 1. There are nine categories of educators receiving the AEL Regional Exchange inserts. As shown in Table 1, 878 (40%) are in the Local School District category; 478 (22%) are in the Institution of Higher Education category; 363 (17%) are in the State Department of Education category, and 287 (13%) are in the Individuals Using Home Address category.

Table 1

Number and Percent of AEL Educational R & D Report Recipients by Category

Recipient Category*	Number of Recipients in this Category	Percent of Total Recipients
Local School District	878	39.59
Intermediate Service Agency	32	1.44
State Department of Education	363	16.37
Center (media, teaching, reading, etc.)	55	2.48
Institution of Higher Education	478	21.55
Educational Association	40	1.80
Individuals Using Home Address	287	12.94
Professionals (not elsewhere classified)	69	3.11
NIE, Regional Labs, and R & D Centers	16	.72
TOTALS	2,218	100.00

*See text for a discussion of these categories.

The other five recipient categories each had less than 4% of the recipients. A total of 2,218 mailing list entries were placed in the nine categories.

Developing the nine AEL Regional Exchange recipient categories from the mailing list was not difficult. The Local School District category included educators in local education agencies as defined by the state. This varied according to the state. For example, in Pennsylvania there are 505 local school districts which cross township, borough, and county lines, while in West Virginia the local school district is the county school system (55 in number). The State Department of Education category included persons employed by the state education agency and, in a few cases, included field office personnel. The Institute of Higher Education category included college and university staff and personnel.

The category of Centers provided the first cases of odd placements. Generally, this category included employees in various types of agencies which are self-designated as "Centers", regardless of the "parent" agency. These included media, teacher, curriculum, reading, regional (within a state), and learning centers. Thus, this category included, for example, employees in a university media center, a local school district reading center, a state education agency curriculum center, and a multiple-agency teacher center. The category of National Institute of Education (NIE), NIE-sponsored Regional Laboratories, and NIE-sponsored university-based Research and Development (R & D) Centers is self-explanatory. Professional Educational Associations (EA) was another recipient category.

Intermediate Service Agency was defined as the educational service agency situated between the state educational agency and the local educational agency. The name for these intermediate service agencies varied according to

the state. In Georgia, they are known as Cooperative Educational Service Agencies, in West Virginia they are known as the Regional Educational Service Agencies, and in Pennsylvania they are simply the Intermediate Units.

Two related, but different, categories require some explanation. The category of Professionals (not elsewhere classified) included individuals who had a professional title (e.g., Director of Training at a hospital or for a company) and whose address was not a home address. The category of Individuals Using Home Address was for those mailing list entries who used a home address and did not have an agency affiliation, even if they had professional titles (e.g., Dr.).

The only substantive discussion regarding answers to the first study question revolve around the issue of the AEL Regional Exchange recipient categories and the intended target audiences from NIE-funded RDx efforts. According to NIE statements, the four target audiences for Regional Programs are: (1) Chief State School Officers (CSSO), (2) school board members, (3) school administrators, and (4) school teachers. As can be seen above and in tables on the following pages, the nine distinct recipient categories and the number of persons in each do not bear a direct one-to-one relationship with the NIE-identified target groups. One could infer easily that the CSSO is represented by the state department of education category. By the same reasoning, it could be inferred that the local school district category includes both administrators and teachers. A more explict breakdown of this category is not an unreasonable activity for a future analysis.

This leaves the NIE-identified RDx target group of school board members not represented as an AEL Regional Exchange recipient category. This does not mean school board members are not receiving the publication--many may.

It simply means that, based on the mailing list as it is now constructed, it is not possible to determine if any of the entries are school board members. It may be that some are and are categorized now in the Individuals Using Home Address, Professionals, or some other recipient category. Several steps could be taken to attend to the NIE-identified target group of school board members. A survey of recipients in the most likely categories could yield a list of those which are school board members. The AEL-Rx could work through the various state departments of education in attempts to reach this special target group. Finally, all future recipients could be asked to ide their employing agency and also state if they are school board members.

The number and percent of AEL Regional Exchange recipients in each category generate some discussion. CEDaR office literature states that half of the Educational R & D Report recipients are local school district personnel. In this study 878 (40%) of the recipients are in the Local School District category. This is more than any other category. Still, this AEL category has 10% less recipients than the national figure for this category. Whether this 10% difference is important may be a topic of discussion by AEL-Rx administrators. That 5% more recipients are in the Institution of Higher Education category than in the State Department of Education category is interesting. The fact that the latter is an NIE-identified target group, while the former is not, might generate some AEL-Rx administrator discussion. It might be that there needs to be some concerted subscription expansion efforts geared specifically to state department of education personnel. Finally, the 13% in the category labeled Individuals Using Home Address is unusually high. The problem is not a disinterest in providing the publication to anyone, rather the concern is that, by being sent to a home address, the parties responsible for the content of the copy don't know exactly the

job function or job title of the recipients. That this problem is relevant for a full 13% of the total AEL-Rx mailing list seems worthy of action, if not changing. A related issue is the assumption, false or not, that AEL Regional Exchange issues sent to home addresses will have less chance of being shared with co-workers. Since AEL-Rx administrators hope for future spread of regionwide R & D activities and products contained in the magazine, it seems reasonable to assert that the chances for such spread increase when the publication is mailed to and received at the workplace where much interaction does occur. Steps to reduce the percent of the publication being mailed to persons at their home addresses may be in order.

Study question number two asked what percent of the articles were targeted to those educators receiving the AEL Regional Exchange. A total of 33 articles appeared in the five issues. The team of article reviewers was able to reach consensus on the placement of 30 of the 33 articles (91%). Table 2 presents the number and percent of articles per recipient category. Each article was judged to be geared primarily to one of the categories derived from an analysis of the AEL area mailing list plus an all-inclusive category for articles that truly apply to all groups. Forty percent of the articles were judged to be written for the All Groups and the State Department of Education categories each. Thirteen percent were judged to be written to the Local School District category while 3 percent each were placed in the Intermediate Service Agency and NIE, Regional Labs, and R & D Centers categories. Table 2 shows that five recipient categories had no articles assigned to them.

The discussion concerning the results answering research question number two centers on the distribution of the AEL Regional Exchange articles. The articles are distributed unevenly among the recipient categories.

Table 2

Number and Percent of AEL Regional Exchange
Insert Articles Per Recipient Category

Recipient Category	Number of Articles Placed in this Category	Percent of Total Recipients
Local School District	4	13.33
Intermediate Service Agency	1	3.33
State Department of Education	12	40.00
Center (media, teaching, reading, etc.)	0	0
Institution of Higher Education	0	0
Educational Association	0	0
Individuals Using Home Address	0	0
Professionals (not elsewhere classified)	0	0
NIE, Regional Labs, and R & D Centers	1	3.33
All Groups	12	40.00
TOTALS	30	99.99*

*Does not total 100.00 because of rounding.

Ninety-three percent of all the articles read were judged to be written for three groups: the Local School District, State Department of Education, and All Groups categories. Two categories had the remaining seven percent of the articles. The question of real recipient categories and intended NIE target groups is again a relevant issue. Many of the concerns expressed above on this issue apply here, also. The lack of any futher breakdown of the Local School District category into administrators (especially principals) and teachers raises some questions in the evaluation process.

It might be reasonable to ask if it is satisfactory to have identifiable AEL Regional Exchange recipient categories with no articles geared toward them. Consider for a moment the Institution of Higher Education category. Twenty-two percent of all recipients of the publication belong to this category, yet not a single article was judged to be written primarily to this group. While it is true that this category could profit from the 40% of the articles in the All Groups category, the fact remains that no articles were written primarily for Institution of Higher Education personnel. Also, if more accurate and complete mailing list data were known or obtained on the individuals using home addresses category, then perhaps a more accurate Table 2 would result. As it stands now, a full 13% of the recipients are in a category which, if more information were available, might change the results shown in Table 2. It reasonable to assert that the other eight categories are inclusive enough to include recipients from the home address category, if more complete information were known on each entry.

Study question number three asked what proportion of the AEL Regional Exchange's total copy lines is targeted to those categories receiving the publication. Table 3 presents data answering this question. Displayed are number and percent of insert column copy lines per recipient category.

Table 3

Number and Percent of AEL Regional Exchange
Insert Column Copy Lines Per Category

Recipient Category	Number of Column Lines in this Category	Percent of Total Column Lines
Local School District	124	12.94
Intermediate Service Agency	18	1.88
State Department of Education	290	30.27
Center (media, teaching, reading, etc.)	0	0
Institution of Higher Education	0	0
Educational Association	0	0
Individuals Using Home Address	0	0
Professionals (not elsewhere classified)	0	0
NIE, Regional Labs, and R & D Centers	16	1.67
All Groups	510	53.24
TOTALS	958	100.00

Fifty-three percent of the total column lines were targeted to the All Groups recipient category. Thirty percent of the total column lines were targeted to the State Department of Education category. Thirteen percent of the column lines were assigned to the Local School District category. The Intermediate Service Agency and NIE, Regional Labs, and R & D Centers categories each had two percent of the total column lines.

Discussion regarding the results answering question number three revolves around the distribution of AEL Regional Exchange copy column lines. It may be that having 53% of the copy lines targeted to the All Groups category neutralizes discussion items raised above. On the other hand, maybe the discussion items are still valid. The previous discussion calling for a better breakdown of the Local School District category may still be relevant at this point. Certainly the issue of having five recipient categories with no specific articles geared primarily toward them is still relevant. AEL-Rx administrators might want to address this issue of the lack of column copy lines for actual recipient categories. The discrepancy between who actually receives the publication and the lack of articles geared specifically to them seems to be a reasonable discussion issue for AEL-Rx administrators and editorial decisionmakers. Planned modifications in the distribution of copy lines might be an outcome of such editorial decisionmaking. On the other hand, the decisionmakers may proceed as before and let the article content "fall" where it may with no planned intervention steps. In either case, Table 3 presents an interesting display of the inserts' contents.

Research question number four asked what is the average number of column lines per recipient category receiving the AEL Regional Exchange. Table 4 displays data answering this question. Here it can be seen that the mean number of column lines per article for the State Department of Education

Table 4

Mean and Standard Deviation for the Number of AEL Regional Exchange Insert Column Copy Lines Per Article for Each Recipient Category

Recipient Category	Mean Number of Column Lines Per Article	Standard Deviation
Local School District	31.00	22.91
Intermediate Service Agency	18.00	N/A
State Department of Education	42.50	53.54
Center (media, teaching, reading, etc.)	N/A	N/A
Institution of Higher Education	N/A	N/A
Educational Association	N/A	N/A
Individuals Using Home Address	N/A	N/A
Professionals (not elsewhere classified)	N/A	N/A
NIE, Regional Labs, and R & D Centers	16.00	N/A
All Groups	24.17	20.31

category was nearly 43. The mean number of lines for each Local School District article was 31. For All Groups articles, the mean number of lines per article was 24. For all the other categories there were either no articles assigned to them or only one article for which there was no standard deviation statistic.

Discussion findings regarding the fourth question revolve around the matter of length of articles. From the findings, it can be seen that the State Department of Education articles are the longest with an average of nearly 43 lines. This may be desirable in the eyes of AEL-Rx administrators. But, it may be deemed undesirable. If the latter is the case, then modifications in future copy for this category can be implemented. Recall that this category was tied for first in terms of percent of total articles with 40%. Thus, a large amount of the AEL Regional Exchange copy is devoted to the State Department of Education category. This is in line with the NIE target group and AEL operational mode. The second longest articles were in the Local School District category. Assuming this category includes both principals and teachers--both NIE target groups--then this article length may be appropriate. Articles for the Intermediate Service Agency and NIE, Regional Labs, and R & D Centers were about the same length (16-18 column lines). Table 4 vividly displays the lack of column lines for five AEL Regional Exchange recipient categories. Again, this fact seems worthy of policymaker discussion and, if necessary, action steps. The results of such efforts could be a more equitable and even distribution of articles and copy lines per recipient category.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the content analysis of the AEL Regional Exchange described and

reported in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Thirteen percent of the AEL region mailing list entries receive the Educational R & D Report at their home address. If this figure is typical across other regions, then about 1,700 persons receive the publication at home. This is seen as too many. Therefore, it is recommended that the Council for Educational Development and Research and its Cooperative School Improvement Program, publishers of the Educational R & D Report, update the mailing list. This could be done easily with a tearout form printed in the publication. Further, this mailing list update form should include space for recipients to list their job titles and/or job functions, their employing agency's address, and their business mailing address. The update form should restrict the use of home addresses.

2. All future recipients of the AEL Regional Exchange should be required to list their job title and/or job function, their employing agency's address, and their business mailing address. The use of home mailing addresses for persons be added to the AEL Regional Exchange should be discouraged. All ESO state consultants who secure new names for the mailing list should be informed of this procedural step. Moreover, the mailing list invitation form should be designed and instructions written as to prevent persons using their home addresses.

3. A meeting of AEL-Rx administrators--persons responsible for the content of the AEL Regional Exchange inserts--should be held to discuss the findings in this study. Data contained in the tables and the discussion sections could provide points for the decision-makers to discuss. Following this discussion a plan of action may be designed to inact modifications or improvements. However, it should be pointed out that a possible outcome of this meeting is that no major changes are required and that no plan of action is needed.

4. A replication of this content analysis study of the AEL Regional Exchange should be implemented in the future. Since it seems that it requires about six issues to produce enough copy to analyze, the next study should be conducted in a year and one half or two years from now.

APPENDIX A:

Content Analysis Form

Appalachia Educational Laboratory

Educational Services Office

Ed. R & D Report Content Analysis Form (CAF)

Directions: Please read the articles taped to 8 1/2 x 11 paper one at a time in order. Record the article numbers appearing at the center of each article's first paragraph on this form in the left hand column. After reading each article, decide which one of the following ten (10) target audience categories it is most appropriate for based on your professional judgement. Make a tally mark in the category column opposite the article number. If unable to categorize an article to one of the ten categories, use the 11th category--Unable to Classify. Each article must be categorized as appropriate for one of the 11 response options. Thank you for your assistance.

Article Number	Target Audience Group										
	Local School District	Intermediate Service Agency	State Dept. of Education	Center (Media Teaching, Reading)	Institution of Higher Education	Education Assoc.	Individuals using Home Address	Professionals (Not Elsewhere Classified)	NIE, Regional Labs & R&D Centers	All Groups	Unable to Classify

Article Number	Target Audience Group										
	Local School District	Intermediate Service Agency	State Dept. of Education	Center (Media Teaching, Reading)	Institution of Higher Education	Education Assoc.	Individuals using Home Address	Professionals (Not Elsewhere Classified)	NIE, Regional Labs & R&D Centers	All Groups	Unable to Classify